

ORGANIZATION OF THE NAVY.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,

TRANSMITTING

A copy of Commodore Stewart's letter, of date 23d March, 1842, relative to the organization of the navy.

FEBRUARY 9, 1844.

Read, and referred to the Committee on Naval Affairs.

NAVY DEPARTMENT, February 1, 1844.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit, herewith, "a copy of the letter from Commodore Charles Stewart to the Secretary of the Navy, of the 23d of March, 1842, respecting the organization of the navy," in compliance with the resolution of the House of Representatives of January 29, 1844.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

DAVID HENSHAW.

HON. JOHN W. JONES,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

U. S. FLAG SHIP INDEPENDENCE,

New York, March 23, 1842.

SIR: In accordance with the desire you expressed, when I had the honor of an interview with you, I will now endeavor to present some observations in relation to our naval service, which will, I hope, correspond with the views and principles you may have formed, and still cherish. The great desire you have evinced for the welfare of the martial arm over which you preside, and the convictions which you have so ably and so zealously proclaimed and enforced, of the necessity of fostering it, have been approved by the nation, and will go far to reanimate the service. You have succeeded in impressing the public attention with the high necessity of its thorough re-organization, which it now becomes of the greatest moment should be as complete as possible, under laws, rules, and regulations of the simplest and most efficient kind; for, if we look back to the emanations of this character from *both ends* of the Navy Department, for the last twenty five years, we shall be astounded with the incongruous orders, the multiplicity of circulars, and the violations of law and rights, which have tended

to arrest the development of our naval qualifications, and have almost paralyzed the energies of our officers.

By the establishment of the Board of Navy Commissioners, it was fondly hoped that, in compliance with the law, a uniformity in the respective classes of vessels would be obtained, and a concise code of regulations be established, which would secure economy throughout its civil administration, and devolve an effective responsibility on all persons therein engaged, and at all times. For this important post the most distinguished captains were generally selected, some of whom soon perceived that there was a wide difference between organizing, fighting, and controlling a ship of war, and the conducting, economizing, and regulating a whole establishment. Here has been the fruitful source of many of the evils under which our navy has labored. The want of individual responsibility; the absence of economy in the construction, equipment, and repairs of our ships; the diversity in their models, classes, and qualities; the incapacity of some, and the worthlessness of others; the excessive waste by continual experiments, have never perhaps been surpassed, if ever equalled, in any other naval establishment of the same limits. Vacillations, which ought never to have been tolerated, have prevailed; and instances have occurred where draughts and models have been made, approved, and adopted; the timber has been contracted for; but, before or after its delivery, these propensities of the board, or a change in some of its members, have begotten new views; another form and other dimensions have been then given to the vessel, which have required the frames of two to furnish the frame of the one to be built: thus, having only one ship at the expense of the frames of two originally intended; the residue of the timber becoming promiscuous, lumbering up the navy-yards, and probably rotting before a vessel of the form and dimensions it would suit was required. And in regard to their experiments in ordnance, I may here not inappropriately refer to the recent melancholy occurrence on board the steamer *Fulton*, [which] was caused by the attempt to convert a number of 42-pounders into 68-pounders, by "reaming up" or enlarging the calibre, under the expectation that the increased explosive shock of a 68-pounder could be sustained by a large reduction of metal from the cannon, which scarcely possessed a sufficient quantity for the purposes of a 42-pounder—resulting in the death and injury of several seamen, and diminishing their confidence in the security of naval armaments. It is unnecessary, however, that I should lengthen this letter with a detail of abuses; for I believe there is now a very *general acquiescence* in the opinion that the establishment of this board has failed to meet the expectations that were indulged by the service and the country, and that there exists now a disposition in the authorities to change the plan of its present organization.

Let it not be understood, however, from what I have said, that it is my intention to cast any reflection upon those who have, at different times, composed the Board of Navy Commissioners, or to impute to them views designed for the injury of our common service; for they have generally been men of high professional attainments, and desirous of promoting the welfare of the navy. But I believe the error to be in the *system*, and that the law calls upon the officers of the board for *more than* their *profession* and *acquirements* enable them to perform with the expected judiciousness and economy. And permit me here to state, that, in my apprehension, that system only will be productive of the desired results, which shall have at all times competent and able agents to execute its requirements, individually

responsible themselves to the head of the department, who himself, through the Chief Magistrate, shall be the subject of a sole and undivided responsibility to the nation. Although, by a classification of the duties now performed by the Board of Navy Commissioners, and their assignment to separate naval officers, as has been recommended by Mr. Paulding, the acts of each officer may be more clearly placed before the public view; it nevertheless becomes a matter of great doubt, in my mind, whether, in the *limited* number of the rank to which you must necessarily be confined for your selections, individuals can at all times be found of such talents, information, and accomplishments, as to be enabled to take the charge and control of the important and diversified branches of service required of them. By some of the resolutions of Congress, and various orders of the Executive department, it is evident that the capacities and acquirements of naval officers have been overrated. They have thus been diverted from their regular professional duties, and subjected to responsibilities to which they have been found unequal; consequently, failures have ensued, where the best results were anticipated. In saying this, I mean, of course, no disparagement to them. They may sustain our good character, abroad and at home, at all times: they may be expert and skillful seamen in peace, and be able bravely to vindicate the honor of our flag in war. But we must regard things as they are. When Congress shall choose to extend to the young officer of the navy those advantages which may be derived from a proper instruction, the force of these objections will be materially diminished.

The failure of the present system was evident to my mind at its organization; and *I predicted it* in a letter to the Hon. William Reed, chairman of the naval committee of the House of Representatives in 1814, who had invited me to give my opinion upon a plan for a navy board, at that time under the consideration of Congress. I therein stated, that, although when considered as an auxiliary to the department, it would relieve its head from much of the detail duties, which were too *extensive* and diversified for any one person to discharge with the necessary attention; yet that it would fail in placing our naval establishment on the best foundation, and in conducting it with the requisite economy in all its branches. In the year 1813, in reply to a letter from the Hon. Langdon Cheves, chairman of the naval committee, I had the honor to submit a plan for the reorganization of the Navy Department, such as the wants of the service seemed to me at *that* time to require.

The principal features in it were the placing *each* branch of the service under competent and responsible agents, and holding them accountable for all their expenditures and proceedings. The professional business of the department would then have been conducted by the following officers, who, I supposed, would have been sufficient for the duties required:—a constructor general, a commissary general, a surgeon general, and a master of ordnance. These officers, who were each to have been fully conversant with the branch of service under his control, and who need not necessarily have been selected from the navy, could have been *occasionally* joined by one or two experienced post captains—at such times constituting a board of navy commissioners, and assembling periodically, and just before the meeting of Congress, to prepare estimates for supplies, and for the discharge of other duties which might be committed to their care. A modification of this plan, adapting it to the many changes which have occurred since that period, in the augmentation of the navy, both in its *ma-*

teriel and *personnel*, and in the increased facilities for construction and repairs, would seem to me to answer all the purposes required. I would, therefore, recommend the establishment of the following bureaux :

1. A bureau for surveying and inspecting the navy.
2. A bureau for construction and repairs.
3. A bureau for the supervision and improvement of navy and dock yards, for the equipment of vessels of war, and the supply of boatswains', gunners', and carpenters' stores.
4. A bureau for ordnance and arms.
5. A bureau of medicine, surgery, and hospitals.
6. A bureau for the supply of provisions and pursers' stores.

By this organization will be obtained all the professional information in every branch of the service that is desirable. For the first bureau will be required a naval officer, as a surveyor and inspector general of the navy, well known to the Government for his talents, skill, and efficiency as a seaman, and intimate acquaintance with vessels of war and maritime affairs; one who could be safely consulted on all occasions, on the employment of the naval forces; and one who should scrutinize closely into the qualifications of officers intended for particular service. He should inspect and survey every ship, in all her parts and equipment, with the eye of a commander, and be competent at once to detect any existing defect, or source of inefficiency, and point to the remedies. He should investigate, and critically examine, any new improvement, or other matter applicable to naval purposes, and present a faithful report thereon. This officer should preside when the heads of the other bureaux were assembled, and acting as a board of commissioners in their combined character. The charge of the second bureau should be committed to a constructor general of the navy, an individual fully conversant with the art and science of construction. He should be competent to examine into all improvements in this art, and report thereon authoritatively; he should be the best judge of the form and qualities to be given to every species of public vessel, and of the adaptation of them to the purposes for which they might be intended. He should also have the direction of all necessary repairs to vessels. At the head of the third bureau may be placed an active, intelligent, and experienced naval captain, who should have the supervision and control of the navy and dock yards, and who should direct the equipment of all vessels of war fitting out for sea, which equipment should be subject to the inspection of the chief of the first bureau, the surveyor and inspector general of the navy; and he should also have charge of the supplies of boatswains', gunners', and carpenters' stores. Over the fourth bureau should be placed a master of ordnance and arms, an individual who would be scientifically and practically conversant with these instruments of war, and on whom a reliance could be reposed for their efficiency and perfection, in order that the lives of valuable men might not be uselessly sacrificed, or our ships captured, and the honor of our flag tarnished from a *defective* armament. This would be an important bureau, and one which it would be difficult to fill efficiently from the navy. Should a resort be necessary to the other arm of our defence, and an officer found fully competent, he might be transferred to a suitable rank in the marine corps, under the augmentation and improvement of that corps, which I shall allude to and suggest, and he would then be constituted one of the *personnel* of the navy. At the head of the fifth bureau would be required an *experienced naval surgeon*. The

charge of the sixth bureau should be committed to an intelligent and faithful purser.

No perfection, however, is to be expected in our naval establishment, if incapable agents are placed over the control of the bureaus, and its general direction. I may be here permitted to observe, that many of its defects under the present organization are to be, in a great degree, attributed to the frequent change of the person placed at its head, who has often not been continued long enough in office to become acquainted with the nature of the naval service, and much less with the services and qualifications of officers. This system of things has led to injurious vacillations in the rules and regulations, to indiscriminate promotions, to rapid changes in the appointment and employment of officers; and opened the door to favoritism, invidious preferences, and injurious influences. I would here beg leave to observe, that the law establishing the navy board comprises some provisions—or perhaps I should say, leads to practices highly injurious to the service, such as that of subjecting senior captains to the orders and mandates of their juniors. The preservation of the rights appertaining to rank and seniority, is one of the first and *highest of military obligations*. If this be not observed, it will be *impossible* to keep unimpaired the *esprit du corps*, so indispensable to the well-being of a military service. An officer, in his reversed position, must feel that he has been much misplaced; and, although it may not carry with it any degradation or inconvenience to him, yet the observance of the orders and mandates of his junior cannot but diminish those kindly feelings for each other, so necessary to a mutual support when the hour of trial comes. In the heedless disregard of the rights attaching to those in military service, there is criminality; and the most beautiful and important attribute of power is the faithful guarding of them from violation. By conserving the rights of officers, so far as may be compatible with justice to the country, you elevate their pride and love of service; whereas, by a disregard of their rights, you render them a spiritless body, and sink them below the noble aspirations by which they should always be distinguished.

The system of razeing ships-of-the-line, lately introduced into the navy, appears to involve consequences calculated to impair its *efficiency*, and is at variance with the principles of economy. Large appropriations have been made for the purpose of building 74 gun ships, and, if some of them are defective in carrying their guns too low, there must certainly be other and better remedies; and I believe there are instances in both the English and French navies, where, by “furring out” or spreading the bottoms, and giving new bearings and increased buoyancy, the lower battery of the ship has been rendered sufficiently high to be effective. This mode, I should think, would be preferable to that of cutting down the costly structure of a line-of-battle ship to a defective *nondescript* frigate—defective, because her principal and most efficient battery is opened to the fire of an enemy’s small arms; the men there stationed are liable to be killed or crippled, and the fire of the cannon impeded by the fall of spars, rigging, blocks, or anything that may be shot away or fall from aloft. The rigging being worked on that deck, the battery must, generally, cease its fire when any manœuvring takes place; and it is often on those occasions when its fire would be of most avail, from a favorable position. The marines, unless placed on the poop-deck, where there are no bulwarks to cover them, must use their muskets through the port-holes. This would inevitably lead to injurious explosions at the time the cannon are being loaded with powder. In addition, there

are the heavy hull, spars, sails, and rigging of a 74-gun ship, to be managed with a reduced crew, or that of a large frigate. In fine, not to mention other defects, they constitute that kind of vessel which neither possesses the celerity of the frigate, nor the force of the line-of-battle ship; and I believe the same description that was found so incompetent for the purposes of either, that it was exploded after the war of 1756—a model of one of which is now to be found in the Philadelphia navy-yard.

Under this disposition to razee our ships-of-the-line, I apprehend that a disinclination in Congress to construct others to replace them will arise, and which, I *fear*, will leave us, in a few years, destitute of a naval force of that class best calculated to meet the heavy ships of an enemy; for, so long as other powers constitute their marines of the several existing kinds of vessels, we *must* meet them with similar ships. It may prove a very fatal idea to suppose that our navy can go on increasing in the smaller vessels of war, without a corresponding increase in the larger ships. Should such be the rule of augmentation, your cruisers would be incapable of coping with the more powerful vessels of an enemy, and would be forced to remain blockaded, and unable to get to sea. If, however, they should succeed in leaving port, through the remissness or insufficiency of a blockading force, they will finally meet the *same* fate which befel nearly all of our small vessels in the late war—that of being added to the navy of the enemy. And thus, in either contingency, would your antagonist have a complete control over the coast, and be capable of inflicting annoyances and injuries along the entire seaboard, which, experience assures us, have occurred before.

It is true, a new engine of war has been found in steamers, and which may prove a highly important auxiliary in harbor defence, and likewise hereafter in the operations of fleets. At present, however, they are incapable of the protracted cruises, the power of endurance, and the concentrated weight of fire, by which ships-of-the-line are enabled to contend with each other, and especially with permanent land-batteries—qualities so *essential* to a naval force. They are imperfect in model, armament, and capacity to carry fuel for the length of time which other ships could sustain themselves at sea. But, in consequence of the great improvements continually occurring, the time may arrive when this kind of vessel will be found so essential, that I apprehend no fleet of importance will put to sea without them, and yet not incur the hazard of falling a prey to an inferior one which possesses them. They would, then, constitute at sea what the flying artillery is on land. With them, an enemy might be approached without fear, and reconnoitred with certainty. They would become the repeaters or telegraphs of the whole fleet. In time of action, they would aid ships-of-the-line to *get into position*; and, like the light cavalry in an army, they would cut off all retreat of the worsted party, intercept flying adversaries, and prevent their escape. Even now, at the present day, I am not prepared to say whether their advantages would not be so great to a fleet, in time of war, as to render it important for each vessel to carry a portion of the fuel intended for their use, or the employment of fast-sailing colliers for that purpose.

But, so far as regards the defence of the coast, bays, and our harbors, they will at once constitute an important portion of the force necessary to be maintained, at all times, for that purpose. You have presented this subject so forcibly and judiciously to the public eye, in your late annual report,

that there can scarcely remain any longer an excuse for omitting the necessary preparations. Our country is peculiarly situated in many respects. It has an immense seacoast to protect, which is indented with innumerable rivers, bays, and harbors, of every diversity of form, depth of water, and extent. The great advantage of steamers, in contributing to the defence of these exposed and extensive borders, must be apparent to every one; and, on account of that highly important and valuable portion of our country which borders on the Gulf of Mexico being entirely severed (so far as regards naval operations) from the Atlantic coast, a large proportion of this species of vessels is imperatively required. Great diversity of opinion prevails, however, with respect to their form, size, the materials of their construction, their armament, and the mode of their propulsion. I would suggest, as the most judicious mode of settling these points, to confide the whole subject to the critical examination of a discreet and intelligent person, actuated by the high considerations of patriotism, and with no other object to subserve than the advancement of the public interests.

In connexion with the defence of our harbors, and the employment of steam-vessels as auxiliary to that purpose, an increase of the marine corps, together with their instruction in field and artillery exercise, is urgently demanded. This corps has been laboring under many disadvantages, on account of the smallness of its number. They have at all times been dispersed and cut up into small detachments and portions for ships, navy yards, &c., so that a full company has scarcely ever been embodied at any place; consequently, they have been deficient in field manœuvres and drill. Thus deprived of the requisite instruction, have they been supplied to ships, to the naval depots, or to the headquarters, continually being recruited and transported from place to place, and station to station, for the purpose of these supplies, until the *contingent expenses* consequent thereon would almost support an additional regiment. And such have been their deficiencies in skill and military exercises, that many of the naval commanders were under the belief, at one period, that their ships would be stronger without them; in consequence of which, an effort was made, in the Senate of the United States, to suppress the corps. (See the call made upon the naval captains, by the resolution of March 1, 1830.)

But, notwithstanding these disadvantages, there is no military body that has been reduced to better subordination and discipline. Brought by the close boundaries of vessels not only under the continual observation of their own officers, but that of the officers of the ship, they are kept up to a degree of discipline which must, from a different state of things, be unknown in encampments and stations for soldiers on shore; and I believe I shall not appeal in vain to the present Commander-in-chief of the Army for evidence of their strict subordination, discipline, and respectful demeanor to all officers while under his command in Florida; and also to bear me out in the statement, that no portion of the encampment was more distinguished for its quiet, order, and police, than that occupied by the marines. An augmentation of this corps would at once place it on a different footing, and enable it to remedy those defects which have impaired its efficiency. It would be well worthy of consideration, whether this increase should not be extended so as to be sufficient not only for our vessels of war and naval stations, but also for the charge of the forts in the vicinity of those stations. Decided advantages on the score of convenience and economy to the Government would attend this arrangement, while it would re-

lease a portion of the army for the more important requirements of the War Department. Our naval depots could be immediately strengthened in cases of emergency, by reinforcements drawn from these posts, which would likewise possess a reciprocal advantage by detachments from the naval depots, and the ships of war lying there. The contingent expenses of the marines would be materially diminished, and much of their time saved, which is now occupied in their being conveyed from post to post. Ships of war which may have returned to port for the purpose of supplying their complement, reduced from death, sickness, or the expiration of terms of service, would not be detained until the proper number should be transported from some distant station, and would thus enjoy facilities of an important character. The marines themselves would become more expert soldiers, and infinitely more useful on board ships of war, from the drilling they would be subjected to in the forts, as well as the practice they would acquire with the musket; and the good training they would receive in the use and fire of cannon would render them particularly efficient on board the steamers employed in harbor defence, which vessels, not requiring sails, could then dispense with seamen, and enable them to pursue their calling where they would be so much demanded—in ships of war and privateers on the ocean. In time of war, the advantage of employing the same description of force under one control in the naval depots, in the forts in their vicinity, and in the harbor steamers, could not be overrated; and on the occasion of any attack on any one point, they could act in a united body, and could also be readily reinforced by the naval officers, seamen, and volunteers of the commercial cities in the immediate neighborhood. For these purposes, an augmentation of the marine corps to a division of four or five thousand men, would be required in periods of active war. It would then become a distinct military arm—at all times, however, under the control of the Navy Department, and the navy of the United States. The officers would have a wider field whereon to display their character as soldiers, and higher grades to look up to for the excitement of their ambition. It would have a happy effect, too, on the navy, and enhance their anxiety for the security of the commercial cities near their naval depots, and again call forth similar energies as were displayed by them when Baltimore was threatened by attack in the late war; on which occasion, the appearance in the streets of a gallant body of seamen and marines under Commodore Rodgers restored the drooping spirits of the citizens and authorities, and banished all idea of the proposition for a surrender, like that of Alexandria, for the purpose of saving the town from destruction. Their good conduct was proved in the subsequent results, as it has often been on other occasions. The defence of the cities of Portsmouth, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Norfolk, and Pensacola, would thus be confided entirely to the marines and the navy, who would thereby enable that portion of the army they would replace to sustain the honor of the country on other fields. That they would prove themselves worthy of these high trusts, there can be no doubt. If there should be, I have only to call to my aid the high authority of Napoleon, that greatest of military commanders, and to use his well-known expression in regard to the marines of the Bellerophon: "What might not be done with a hundred thousand such men!"

As respects the laws for the better government of the navy, you have truly said, in your report, that their defects consist principally in their *looseness*, especially in the latitude given to courts-martial. Although the

punishments are stated in each article, yet the concluding license, "or such other punishment as a court shall inflict," would seem to justify a court in assuming the mitigating power, which the law confides to other authority: hence arises inequality of punishment, or the entire escape of offenders. At one court-martial, a trivial or no punishment may be adjudged to an officer who is, perhaps, worthless; while, at another court, a very meritorious officer may undergo the severest penalties of the law, for a similar offence, owing to the obligation this court may feel themselves under to sustain their own character as the guardians of their service, and meet the spirit of the regulations. A clear definition of the punishment to be inflicted in the most frequent cases, leaving the remission or mitigation of it to the power where it is lodged by law, or under the recommendation of the court, (which shall, if it deems such recommendation proper, embody its reasons for so doing,) will, I think, constitute the best remedy for this evil; and this can be effected by very slight alterations of the present code of laws. I will therefore observe, by way of example, that, in the first article, a commander is, at present, required to correct all such as are guilty of dissolute or immoral practices, "*according to the usages of the sea service.*" A manifest improvement on this vague and indefinite power for effecting the object of the article, would be the adoption of a specific one, such as "an admonition or reprimand from the commander," who would thereby be enabled at once to meet the objects of this article. It would do away, too, with the necessity of resorting, on many trifling occasions, to courts-martial, which renders them oppressive to the service and expensive to the country. On account of a desire to avoid such courts-martial, the service has suffered materially; for the occasions falling under the above article, and which are of the most frequent occurrence, have often been passed over and unnoticed, and an insubordination has, in consequence, grown up, which has contributed, in no small degree, to the destruction of our discipline. A similar abridgment of the discretionary power invested in courts martial should be extended to the other articles. For instance: in article 3d, the punishment of dismissal from the navy should attach, and there should be no opportunity given for an offender to escape with a more trifling one, "or such other punishment as a court martial shall adjudge," when convicted of oppression, cruelty, fraud, theft, profane swearing, or drunkenness. In like manner, throughout the other articles, should a clear and *specific* penalty be attached to each offence. Then, the complaints now so universal against the favoritism and injustice of courts martial would cease. *No inequality* of punishment for the *same* offence, or escape of offenders, would ever occur; and officers, who would thus know their inevitable fate for violations of law, would be more cautious in their acts, and would be more stimulated to ambitious performance of duty.

While upon this subject, I will call your attention to one peculiarity in the laws governing the navy. They give to a commander of a squadron the right of approving and carrying into effect a sentence of *death* against a commissioned or warrant officer; and yet, while vesting him with this high power, they forbid his approval going to the *dismissal* of such officers from the navy. A reversal of these powers would seem to me to be more in accordance with the dictates of sound reason; so that, while the commander of a squadron should have authority over a sentence of *dismissal*, that of *death* should be reserved to the control of the Chief Magistrate. But, whatever may be said of the decisions of courts martial, the preservation of naval rights and of naval discipline emphatically demands that,

when approved by the proper authority, those decisions shall be final and conclusive. The laws have assigned a revisionary and scrutinizing jurisdiction over all the proceedings of courts-martial, with power to correct errors, and to mitigate or remit unwarrantable or cruel punishments. Ought the authorities to pervert a power which has been reserved to them for legitimate and proper purposes, in order to accommodate it to the softer emotions of the heart; to mould it to the purposes of "children and women's tears;" or to make it pliant to the persuasive influence of politicians; and thus *throw back into the service* the convicted members who had dishonoured it, and render an important military establishment, in effect, a charitable institution? The stern protection by the British Government of all the rights of her navy, and her uniform discountenance of every effort to reinstate those who had compulsorily left the service, have contributed, in no small degree, to build up that proud arm of Britain's power. A different policy on the part of our Government will tarnish and degrade the character of a valuable corps; will fill it with heart-burnings, discontent, and jealousies; will teach with what impunity the rigid rules of military discipline can be violated; and will ultimately end in the ruin of all the naval expectations of the country.

The great difficulty of enlisting seamen in the navy, which has grown up more and more of late years, notwithstanding the encouragement given to them by good pay, &c., is to be attributed to various causes; one of the principal of which is, in my apprehension, to be found in the mode of enlisting them. Formerly, when a ship of war was to be employed, the officers were immediately appointed; some of whom, by the selection of the captain, opened two or three rendezvous, for the purpose of recruiting the number of men required. This was generally accomplished by the time the ship was prepared for sea, and often in a few days. This method of procuring seamen was, however, attended with some inconvenience to some commanders; for, limited as the service has been, it has not been without a portion of officers with whom seamen were unwilling to sail. Hence the change of the system. Permanent recruiting establishments have been made, and all men are shipped for general service. They are then *immured* in receiving vessels, which causes them to feel as though they were in floating prisons, where they remain unoccupied often for three, six, or nine months, until they are required for sea. The consequences of this system are, that the best seamen now avoid the naval service, when formerly they preferred it. It is often, also, made to subserve the personal convenience of improvident and destitute men, who resort to the rendezvous and ship into the service for the sole object of immediate relief, which is obtained in the advance of two months' wages which they then receive. Desertion, which was before of so unfrequent occurrence, is thus stimulated; or if there should be no opportunity for this, they seek for their discharge—occupying the time of the Secretary of the Navy by the intercessions of their families, or by what is often of more avail—the eloquence of political partisans; thus subjecting the country to a pecuniary loss, and increasing the expense of recruiting. By the present arrangement, too, much of the time of men is lost on board the receiving vessels; and ships leave port, having on board men whose times of service expire at different periods, a portion of whom are thus detained beyond the period for which they volunteered. A return to the former system would now, I think, be attended with advantage. It is but fair that our seamen should have the same rights as are ex-

tended to the privates in the army, who are permitted to enlist in the infantry, cavalry, or artillery, and in the regiment and company they prefer. Let them choose the officers with whom they will *serve*, and the class of vessels, as well as the particular ones, in which they like to *sail*. What has been deemed the only inconvenience, will constitute, in my mind, an advantage; for it will disclose to the eye of the Government the oppressor or imbecile, and afford it a certain index whereby to judge of the rectitude of conduct and the discretion of those placed in command; and it would constitute an additional inducement for officers to command discreetly and *lawfully*.

The apprentice system, as established in the navy, cannot be relied upon for an ample supply of seamen, as the number of boys who are thus received into the service must be in proportion to the force employed. It will, I apprehend, not go much further than in supplying the petty and warrant officers of vessels of war. The coasting trade was much relied upon formerly as a nursery of seamen; but this source must necessarily be much impaired by the introduction of steam navigation on our inland waters for the transport of merchandise, and the towing of vessels, together with the communications by canals between different rivers. Under these circumstances, should there be no encouragement given to the increase of seamen by some other means in the power of the Government, we shall soon be left with but a small number of native seamen, and will be forced to lean upon time-serving foreigners, who, in the hour of danger, would abandon our service; or, if they remained, would not be entitled to our confidence. I would, therefore, most respectfully suggest that some inducement, by pecuniary aid, or otherwise, be extended to the merchants of the country, to adopt the apprenticing system on board of their vessels. The introduction of this system into the merchant service, under the regulation of wholesome laws, would undoubtedly create a very important nursery for American seamen, and I should presume much more could be accomplished in this way, and with less means, than by the system now practised; and were an avenue kept open in the navy, for the reception of some of the meritorious young men thus schooled, it would go far to induce lads to offer themselves as apprentices in the mercantile marine.

The rule pursued, prior to the establishment of the navy board, for the promotion of young officers, was to require the certificate of all the commanders with whom the candidate had sailed, of his capacity and fitness for such promotion. This dependence on the good opinion of the commanders with whom he served, obliged him to be alert, and to conduct himself properly on all occasions, in order to obtain the necessary certificate, which the commanders felt themselves bound, in honor to the service, not to give when undeserved. The salutary effect of this dependence of young officers on the good opinion of their commanders, through their good conduct and efficiency for promotion, has been verified in by-gone days. Under the present independent system, the young officer scarcely ever looks up to his commander for his approbation; and the commander as seldom takes any interest in the officer, and feels under little or no responsibility for him. The consequence of this state of things is, that merit remains unsought; and officers who can succeed as well without it as with it, are deprived of every spur to ambition and every motive to exertion. The younger officers are promoted indiscriminately, without regard to their character and qualifications; and in the same manner are they advanced in large batches from

rank to rank, year by year, many of them standing in the way of the promotion of meritorious men, and becoming only fit subjects for a retired list. To suppose that every lad who enters the navy is capable of becoming proficient in his profession, competent to conduct your forces on the ocean, and sustain the high responsibilities of his position, would be the same as supposing that every person who embarked in any other profession would also become capable of attaining its highest honors. A more regular and more frequent system of promotions, based upon a strict scrutiny into character and merit, advancing a few at a time, and the establishment of more grades, (which you have so judiciously urged,) would be productive of great advantage, by operating as a constant stimulant to effort on the part of candidates, and inspiring them with hopes which would break down that despondency so apt to be occasioned by slow advancement in time of peace. I would here enjoin on the Government the necessity of not sparing the *pruning-knife*, so essential to the production of good fruit—particularly if used in the lawful way, through courts-martial. There is no navy, however limited, that would not, without this aid, have in its ranks some members by whose expulsion it would be improved; but I may, at the same time, safely say that the proportion of aspiring officers in the navy of the United States *cannot be surpassed*, if equalled, by that of any other power.

The passed midshipman is now required to perform important duties, which were formerly under the control and direction of a very useful class of officers called masters and masters' mates; the consequence of which is, that the navy is closed against that body of expert and consummate seamen who are engaged in the conduct of our commercial marine. This was an impolitic and unjust excision, and was not warranted by our historical reminiscences, which are replete with names for which we are indebted to that service, who have borne the flag of the country gloriously through all its trials on the ocean.

I cannot find language strong enough to express my conviction of the urgent necessity for additional instruction being imparted to the young officers, though I cannot concur in the opinion so often urged in favor of the establishment of an institution similar to that of West Point. The *best school* for teaching the young officer his profession is the ship itself, kept in active employment; but the Government owes it to its own interests, honor, and the cause of justice, that the means should no longer be withheld from him of acquiring a suitable knowledge of mathematics, a thorough acquaintance with the *laws of nations* and the languages of different countries; and, in view of the introduction of steam as a mode of propelling vessels, it will be also highly important that he should be made fully conversant with the principles of that power, and the machinery through which it acts. By the instruction of passed midshipmen in even *one* additional modern language, a ship of war could be at any time furnished with proficient in almost all the different tongues that might be met with on her cruise. In time of war, the benefits that would be derived from a full knowledge of these subjects would be incalculable. While it would enable us to exercise our belligerent rights with propriety and safety, it would also put it in our power to understand the various papers of neutrals, preventing deceptions, or saving them from vexatious detentions and seizures, and the country and officers from damages and complaints. I cannot better illustrate the consequences that resulted from an ignorance of an important language, than by stating a circumstance that came under my own notice during our

last war with Great Britain. While cruising in the *Constitution*, disguised as an English frigate, and under English colors, we fell in with a large merchant ship, which displayed the Russian flag. An officer in the English uniform was sent on board, who was politely received, and, to his surprise, addressed by name. The papers could not be deciphered; the log-book was equally unintelligible; and the ship being under the flag of our good friend the Emperor of Russia, it was supposed that all was right, and she was permitted to go on her way. In the sequel, it was boasted that this was an English vessel, under assimilated Russian papers, with a highly valuable cargo, and that her officers had been selected on account of their having been in the United States, where they had obtained drawings of the appearance of our ships, a personal acquaintance with many of our officers, and a variety of information, which might aid them in screening their vessels from capture. How many other examples of this kind did or might occur, the ease with which this deception was practised may afford some idea.

The practice, heretofore, in our service, of filling up the different grades with more officers than are requisite for duty, and the creating *civil shore* stations for their employment, has ever seemed to me impolitic, and attended with injury to the officers themselves. Service on shore differs, in many respects, from service at sea. The employment is light, and to a great extent apparent. The pride of command, the sensitiveness of rank, and the high bearing so essential to a gallant officer, must necessarily become impaired, and yield to the injurious consequences resulting from habits of inactivity and inaction, and the train of evils which accompany them. The gun boat employment, in former days, was not more destructive to chivalry, morals, and discipline. It is only an active and a devoted career, on his own element, that can constitute the accomplished seaman and skillful commander. This is the only path for the acquirement of distinction, honor, and success, when the country calls upon him to meet the foe on the ocean. I would, therefore, recommend a re-organization of the navy-yards, and the suppression of shore stations as much as possible. Let the navy-yards be reserved for the veterans—those who have served their country meritoriously for a long period of years. The worn-out captains, sailingmasters, boatswains, and sailmakers, would here find useful employment, and, with it, a restingplace in the decline of life. At the same time, the commandant of the yard should be freed from the high and inappropriate responsibilities the present system enjoins, and should be only charged with the general police and security of the yard, and with the equipment and supply of vessels of war, under the direction of the proper bureau; thus securing responsibility, economy, and harmony in each department of business.

But not only are too many officers employed on shore, but they are also crowded on board of our vessels of war, on account of which their duties are so subdivided as to leave but little to be performed by each; their situations are rendered *irksome*, their apartments uncomfortable, and many causes of jealousies, disagreements, and insubordination arise, which have gone far to impair their discipline and *esprit du corps*. In the views which I have at different times set forth on naval subjects, it has been a main point with me, not only to restrict officers, as much as possible, from civil service, but also to keep their numbers within the wants of our navy in peace. And in these views I have been actuated by considerations of permanent advantage to the officers themselves, and to the service in general; for it is at all times good policy to keep in mind, that in our country a

naval establishment can be as readily destroyed by the hand of profusion as by that of penury. By prescribing a limit to it by law, the Executive department would be relieved from the pressure of applicants, the corps would be rendered more select, and the promotions less irregular and more satisfactory in regard to competency and talent. According to the last Navy Register, the vessels now in a condition to be officered would require the following complement:

Names of vessels.	Number of guns.	Number of decks.	Captains.	Commanders.	Lieutenants.	Midshipmen.
Pennsylvania - - -	120	4	1	-	12	30
Columbus - - -	74	3	1	-	9	24
Ohio - - -	74	3	1	-	9	24
North Carolina - - -	74	3	1	-	9	24
Delaware - - -	74	3	1	-	9	24
Independence - - -	54	2	1	-	6	18
United States - - -	44	1	1	-	4	16
Constitution - - -	44	1	1	-	4	16
Java - - -	44	1	1	-	4	16
Potomac - - -	44	1	1	-	4	16
Brandywine - - -	44	1	1	-	4	16
Columbia - - -	44	1	1	-	4	16
Congress - - -	44	1	1	-	4	16
Constellation - - -	36	1	1	-	4	14
Macedonian - - -	36	1	1	-	4	14
Steamer Mississippi - - -	10	1	1	-	4	14
Steamer Missouri - - -	10	1	1	-	4	14
Steamer Fulton - - -	4	1	1	-	3	12
18 sloops of war, from 16 to 20 guns, requiring - - -	-	-	-	18	54	180
10 brigs and schooners - - -	-	-	-	-	30	40
Total number of officers required	-	-	18	18	185	544

Thus, were war to occur immediately, and all the vessels now in condition for service to be officered and sent to sea, 18 captains, 18 commanders, 185 lieutenants, and 544 midshipmen, could only be employed on board to advantage. But, to the actual floating service, let an additional number be allowed for disability from age, sickness, or other causes, and for the supply of all proper stations on shore. The captains' list should be increased by the same number; the commanders' by three-fourths, and the lieutenants' list by one-half. We shall then have, in a state of peace, 36 captains, 32 commanders, 277 lieutenants, and 544 midshipmen—officers sufficient for the whole service; as at no time, unless in war, would all the above vessels be employed. No additional allowance should be made to the midshipmen's list, in order that this grade of officers should be kept con-

stantly on duty at sea; or, in port, in the line of that profession they require to be taught. Vacancies occurring in their list could be filled from the numerous applicants for those appointments.

In addition to the foregoing numbers, there would be required, if all our ships repairing, rotten, or on the stocks, were in a condition to proceed to sea, the following:

	Captains.	Commanders.	Lieutenants.	Midshipmen.
For 6 additional ships of the line -	6	-	54	144
For 7 additional frigates -	7	-	28	112
Total -	13	-	82	256
Add for casualties, &c. -	13	-	41	
Total required -	26	-	123	256
To this add the number as before stated -	36	32	277	544
	62	32	400	800

This number, therefore, of 62 captains, 32 commanders, 400 lieutenants, and 800 midshipmen, would be amply sufficient for every post, which ought to be assigned to naval officers—supposing that we were in a state of war, and every vessel equipped that we have provided. Whatever additional vessels would be required on the lakes, could be officered by making the proper number of promotions, and filling up their vacancies in the midshipmen's list.

Formerly, I could not but feel some delicacy in referring to the subject of higher rank in the navy; but now I feel that I may do so, with more propriety, because my years admonish me that the time for studying its duties, in order to be enabled to meet its responsibilities, has passed away, and has left me, so far as I am personally concerned, indifferent to the rank. The establishment of the grade of admirals, at the close of the last war, would have been highly gratifying to those officers who had an opportunity of distinguishing themselves; and although its mantle might not, at that time, have rested on any of their shoulders, their proudest satisfaction would have been, that the assent of the nation had been acquired to this rank as a reward for their meritorious services, and that a new stimulant, other than a pecuniary compensation, had been offered for future efforts. Then, it would have invigorated the service, and held out a pinnacle for young ambition to climb to; it would have contributed materially to the discipline and subordination of the navy, and thus prepared it for any future contests with that of any other nation which might be arrayed as an enemy of the country.

At the time that the narrow limits of a peace establishment were assigned to the navy, the necessity for higher rank, with a view to actual service

in fleets or squadrons, was not very great; but a just policy would not have diminished the utility of it, even on that account; for, then, the service contained several gallant men who had contributed, by their skill, valor, and patriotism, to establish the independence of our country. Early in the revolutionary war they were appointed captains—that rank they still retained in wars of more recent date; and in later years, when the scenes of life were about to close around them, they were still found to be “captains in the navy.” If we seek in the national legislature for the grounds of this policy in regard to higher rank, we find ourselves at fault; nor can we divine a single sound reason for it. Is this higher rank inexpedient with us, because our navy is more limited in force and numbers than the navies of the great powers of Europe? This very fact, it seems to me, is a reason for the adoption of a contrary policy; for, then, the rank and value of its appointments would compensate for the deficiency of respect it naturally commands through its inferiority. Occasions might occur (as they have already occurred) when a co-operation with a foreign force, employed for the same object, would be desirable. This could not take place in consequence of the lowness of the grade or rank of the American commander; and thus the inequality of rank in the commanding officers, forbidding an equality of effort, opinion, and responsibility, there would be lost to the country opportunities of effecting valuable results through a combination of force with friendly powers. Occasions such as these have already arisen in the limited history of our service.

In the war with Tripoli, an inadequate naval force was sent to chastise that regency for their insults and aggressions. At the same time, a similar force, under an admiral, was employed by Sweden against the same state, and with the same object. These forces, acting separately, neither could, nor did they, effect anything; but, united, they could have obtained every result desired, and in a short time have dictated their own terms to the common enemy. In consequence of the disparity of the rank of the commanding officers, a union of their two forces was not practicable; and the feelings of an American captain, and a sense of the national honor, would not admit of his placing himself, voluntarily, in a subordinate situation to others. After a short period the Swedish forces retired from the contest, having made peace by tribute. The United States continued the war a few years longer; nor did they retire under a treaty of peace, until after they had encountered heavy additional expenses for continued and increased forces—after the loss of one of their finest frigates—after the incarceration, for many months, in dungeons, of the officers and crew of that frigate, and a considerable expenditure for their final ransom—and after the loss of several gallant men.

However little importance “*we*” may attach to the subject of precedence or equality in honors and salutes with foreign nations, we should not forget that even the most inconsiderable maritime powers abroad consider it of too much consequence to be overlooked. Our intercourse and exchange of hospitality with them are marred, for our commanders are nowhere received on that equality which does not involve a diminution of respect for our country and the honor of our flag. Our officers have feelings of their own on this subject, it is true; but they have also feelings for their country. A disposition has been evinced by one or two nations to place our captains commanding squadrons on a footing with the lowest grade of their flag-officers. But *no* American commander could so far forget himself as to

receive as a boon, from other nations, that which was *denied* him by the policy of his own.

Whether this rank be accorded to the navy or not, I would *unhesitatingly recommend your suppression of the system of broad pendants*. Formerly, this was the emblem displayed to designate the locality of the senior officer afloat; but *now*, the naval regulations *have perverted* this simple object to the gratification of personal vanity, and, not unfrequently, three flags may be seen flying side by side, where no more force floats than the three ships of war from which they fly. Where they are in use, they must sometimes lead to the interruption of harmony in the fleet or squadron; and instances have not been wanting where the flying of two pendants of different colors has led to collisions between the officers, and also the seamen.

In thus presenting to you, sir, these observations on our naval service, I have felt that the subject is one of a very fruitful character, and I have confined myself to what seems to me to comprise its most serious defects, feeling that I should trespass too much upon your time and patience by entering more minutely into all its ramifications. I will therefore conclude by observing, that the best system and the best remedies would be of no avail, unless directed by skill, *vigor*, and efficiency. That these qualities will be found in your administration of this department, the favorable auspices under which it has been commenced afford the surest guarantee to the navy and country; and on some future occasion, when, perhaps, by victories and triumphs upon the ocean, a halo of glory may encircle this right arm of our defence, to *your* administration may be referred the commencement of an era which *restored* the lost energies of the service, and rendered the navy again the pride of the republic.

I have the honor to be, sir,

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
CHAS. STEWART.

To the Hon. A. P. UPSHUR,
Secretary of the Navy, Washington.

